



Summer News

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www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Apprentice Memories

When I came to Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA), I was part way through a one year, two day a week, gardening apprenticeship at a manor house near Bristol. Other than a bit of labouring, this was the first gardening I had ever really done, so why did I want to do an apprenticeship at SCA?



For many years I had been interested in thing ecological and livelihood based, having done a degree in environment and development studies including experience of rural development and community forestry in Cambodia. I had gotten more involved in the people or social side of community development in this country but this had often felt somehow disconnected. However, a year living in on the edge of a provincial town in Cambodia had opened my eyes to the potential of small fruit and vegetable gardens and fields, and how they played a key role in community. On returning to England I wanted to pursue this way of connecting with people, creation and livelihood.

For the first year of the apprenticeship I worked three days a week, and it was largely absorbed by learning the many practical and technical skills needed on the farm both with regards to vegetables and livestock. I

remember vividly the first few weeks (or was it months?) of weeding carrots and not being able to keep up with Laurence, Mark and Ute or struggling to work out how to spread the hay out for the cattle with a deft flick of a fork. I relished the work though and enjoyed the team, feeling like I had come home in many ways. The biodynamic training blocks provided a stimulating conversation partner to discuss a more holistic approach to agro-ecosystems.

The second year of my apprenticeship involved various shifts, all underpinned by the desire and necessity of making a livelihood out of growing as soon as the apprenticeship finished. So, there was more emphasis on veg work and less on the animals. I went up to four days a week. I dropped the biodynamic training blocks. Another shift was to start get my head round understanding how the whole farm system works, in particular, planning it all for all year round production.



I got involved in starting two initiatives in Bristol, in order to start applying my learning but also to prepare the ground for when my apprenticeship finished. The first being

setting up a communal allotment for Asylum Seekers and Refugees, which has now been running for two years. The second initiative involved trying to start a new CSA in Bristol. So, quite a steep learning curve but it is about to get steeper!

The third part of my apprenticeship, the art of growing, is still to come. By this I mean the art of observing and responding to the soil, weather, and the millions of other interactions on a farm. This is the bit where I can't mimic Mark, Ute, Laurence and Sam or cut and paste Mark's plans!

I guess I have been doing it a bit at the Asylum Seekers Allotment and other

community allotments I have subsequently got involved with. The big test though is now that I have finished at SCA: with one other young grower, a committed core group and a fledging co-operative, we have just started Sims Hill Shared Harvest in Bristol.

We started cultivating last month and plan to have fifty shares this year. The soil and people are great but the weeds and getting water and fencing on site will be a challenge!

It has been a great privilege and delight to have been at SCA for nearly three years. I came to the right place!
Tim

Dates for your Summer Diary

Farm Days: – Fourth Saturday of each month, 10.00 to 13.00: Check email for dates.

If you have any suggestions or questions about the farm days please email me at samueljhardiman@hotmail.com

Saturday 10 September: Stroud Festival of Nature in Stratford Park. We have booked a stall for us to have children's games, bbq, veg & membership display, plant sales & maybe showing of animals. Sue Dance is organising and she will send further details as they come through.

Growing Pains and Gains

I know it's not news to anyone that we have had an incredibly dry spring. Normally we would expect to get about 60 to 70 mm each month in March, April and May. This year we had precisely 7mm in March, 1mm in April, and thankfully 24mm in May. This made for a very challenging time in the market garden. Not only was it necessary to water everything that was planted out, but also it was impossible to cultivate some areas of land at Brookthorpe because the soil had become so dry and hard. Fortunately we have had some rain now and we are over that crisis, but though it might not feel it to you, we really could still do with a lot more rain this summer to replenish the usual soil moisture.



Most of the veg fields are planted up now. The last remaining plot is at Hawkwood, which will be planted at the end on July with winter brassica (cabbage family) crops such as purple sprouting broccoli. With the early spring warmth some crops which were planted earlier in the year are at a more advanced stage. Lettuces and spinach, for example, are at least 10 days earlier than usual, but some of the later planted crops have been delayed by the dry. It all usually balances out in the end, some crops doing well and others not so well.

One other difficulty that we have had this spring is the wireworm damage to celeriac and Brussels sprouts. In the last newsletter I wrote about cultivating a new area of land at Brookthorpe and expanding the veg area.

This is a direct quote from that article “There can be problems with planting in newly ploughed land with pests that inhabit pastureland carrying over and feeding on the roots of subsequent crops..... We can’t predict how bad this may or may not be.” Well we have witnessed how bad it can be. About 80% of the 4000 or so seedlings that we planted there were killed within three weeks by wireworm feeding on the roots. Every plant that we pulled up to inspect uncovered a viper’s nest of wireworms all feeding on the roots and gradually killing the plants. The continuous dry spell didn’t help. We have now sown this area with mustard, a

crop that wireworm particularly like, which encourages them to develop, mature and fly away (hopefully to the neighbours fields).

So all in all, not an easy time. But the compensation is that we are harvesting a lot of veg now, and this week (July 10th) we will have all our produce in the veg share. The potatoes, early carrots and onions are all looking particularly fine and the courgettes and beans are beginning to mature. We have a great hard working farm team, and hopefully we will continue to have a productive summer.

Mark

Core Group Big Questions

Core group is always a fine mixture of everyday keeping the machine ticking over tasks and some big questions. This quarter our meetings and work have been focused in three main areas.

- Promoting SCA locally and recruiting
- Improving the facilities for members and staff
- Beginning to consider “where next” for SCA

There are always events to attend and new people to try to involve, and as we do every year we’ve had our stall up at the Hawkwood Open day and are putting together our offer for the Stroud Festival of Nature.

This year we’re planning a tour of the farm and cooking up some of our produce to sell as well as the stall – got to make use of that Emerson college student whose excellent bread has been in the Brookthorpe packing shed recently! You may have seen us at the edible garden event too, sharing with StroudCo, the local food co-op.

We’ve agreed to put in toilet and washing facilities at Brookthorpe – a community affair this, bringing an existing washroom back into use and recycling a member’s kit for the toilets – and will be organising some tidying



up and improving the picnic area at Hawkwood too in the next few months.

But we’ve also been discussing some bigger plans – getting sufficient irrigation thought out and costed and thinking about Martin Smith’s idea of leasing land from a Biodynamic Land Trust. This is not the only offer of land or funding related to land we’ve had recently. Its prompted us to ask ourselves how SCA should develop.

We are a success story as we are (our name turns up in the most unexpected places, like the Cabinet Office!), but how do we protect that success and make this great community business more stable and valuable? Should we aim to acquire our own land, for instance?

Should we focus on consolidating the core offer of food – becoming more self-sufficient and making links with other community businesses, like the bread co-op?

We fully intend to involve more than just the core group in thinking about this – so expect some more from us over the next months about the future.

And one final thing – if anyone has the skills and wish to take on the Treasurer role, we’re looking for you!

Kevin

Sam's Very Latest

This farm report comes just as I go away on holiday, I am leaving in the knowledge that the barns are full of hay, there are piglets running around and the grass is growing.

I would like to thank all those that helped bring the hay in. We spread it out over two days which made it much more manageable.

We baled Brookthorpe on Saturday. Once the hay was in the barn, Sue Bohlen made scones with cream and jam, which was washed down with tea in our back garden.

Hawkwood yielded plenty of bales (606). These were successfully loaded into the barn on Sunday. We had a total of 1100 bales over the two farms. With the silage made earlier in the year, this will go a long way towards providing enough winter feed for our cows.



There are now thirteen very lively, adventurous piglets running around at Brookthorpe. Ezmie our Gloucester old spot sow farrowed on the 22nd of June. Everyone is welcome to come and visit them. I would just ask that you refrain from going in the pen with the sows as they are usually very friendly but when they have piglets are not always predictable. The piglets come out of the pen and play around where you can pet them.

Ezmie's daughter is due to farrow this week. She really needs a name. If anyone has any suggestions please email them to me.

The cattle are all doing well. We will be having a bull on the farm at Brookthorpe soon. He is a Hereford bull from a farm up the road. This will mean more little Herefords in the spring.

I hope to see some of you at the next work day on Saturday 23 July at Brookthorpe.

Sam

Holidays

Please could you let me know if you will be away this summer and not collecting your veg share. I have left a sheet up in each of the two packing sheds for you to notify me of any weeks when your share won't be collected.

Of course you are welcome to pass your share on to friends, but if you do, please give them **specific instructions** as to how to open the lock, how to collect the veg and **exactly** when they can collect the share. It saves them any frustrations and us any embarrassment at turning people away if they come too early.

If you collect your veg from the Painswick Inn, Nailsworth, or Gloucester, please let me know if you won't be collecting at any time (preferably by email). Thanks, Mark

mark@plumtucker.co.uk

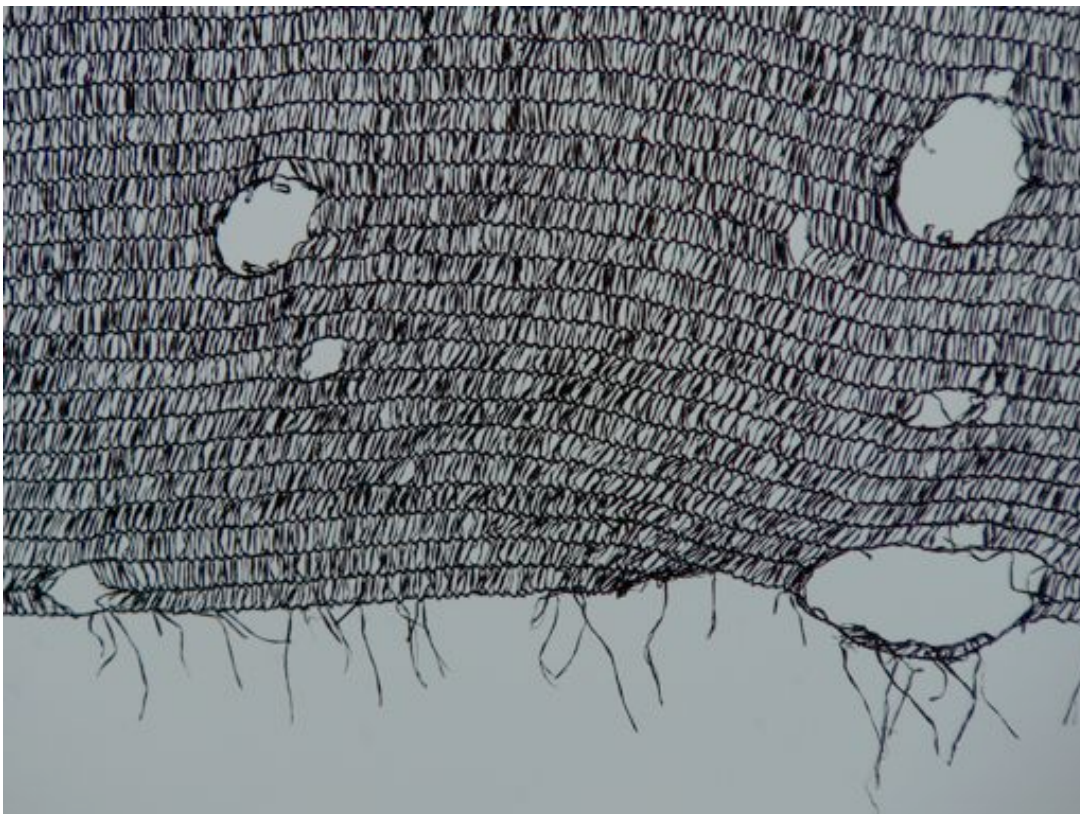
We Need More Members

If you enjoy being a member of SCA and getting some of your food from our beautiful farms then please tell your friends. We really need more people to join. So please, spread the word. Show them this video on Edible Gardens: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBSIhrGMYWI>

There are joining forms in the packing sheds for anyone to take. Phone 0845 458 0814 for more information or look at the website <http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org>

Local food benefits communities

A groundbreaking project from The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has recently published six reports showing the scale and impact of local food webs in towns and cities across England. They are the first part of extensive research into how local food shapes and benefits local communities, economies and the countryside. For full details and to download the reports, click [here](#). Thanks to National Trust Cream of the Crop Newsletter.



Ruth Davey

Stroud Community Agriculture

Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members.

We are looking for new members for the farm. Please tell everyone you know about us. If you know of an event or somewhere that you think would be good for us to promote the farm, please let the core group know. We work to the following principles:

- *To support organic and biodynamic agriculture.*
- *To pioneer a new economic model based on mutual benefit and shared risk and ensure that the farmers have a decent livelihood.*
- *To be fully inclusive. Low income shall not exclude anyone.*
- *To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.*
- *To encourage practical involvement on all levels.*
- *To offer opportunities for learning, therapy and re-connecting with the life of the earth.*
- *To network with others to promote community supported agriculture to other communities and farms and share our learning (both economic and farming).*
- *To encourage Stroud Community Agriculture members, in co-operation with the farmers, to use the farm for their individual and social activities and celebrations.*
- *To develop a non-exclusive sense of community around the farm.*

Core Group

The core group meets one evening a month. For dates, venues & times, contact Sue Dance.

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Photos by Ute

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